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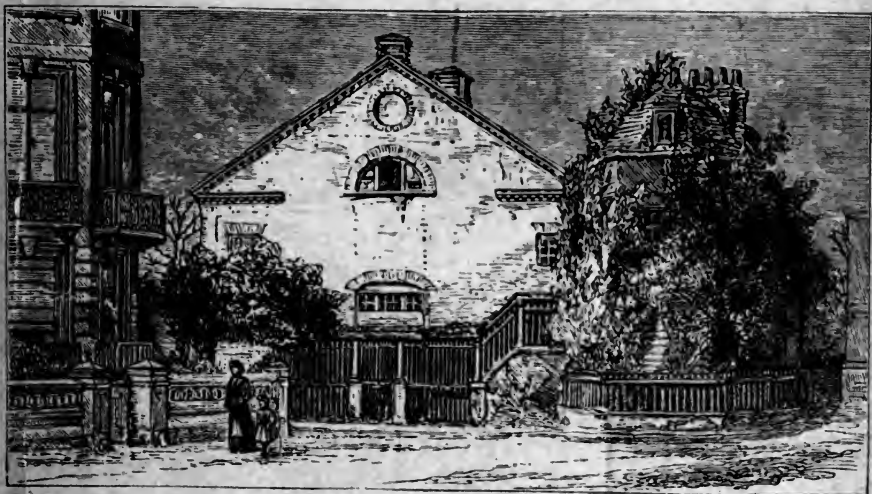
ONE SHILLING.]

A Celebrated Old Playhouse.

THE HISTORY OF RICHMOND THEATRE

(IN SURREY),

FROM 1765 TO 1884.



BY

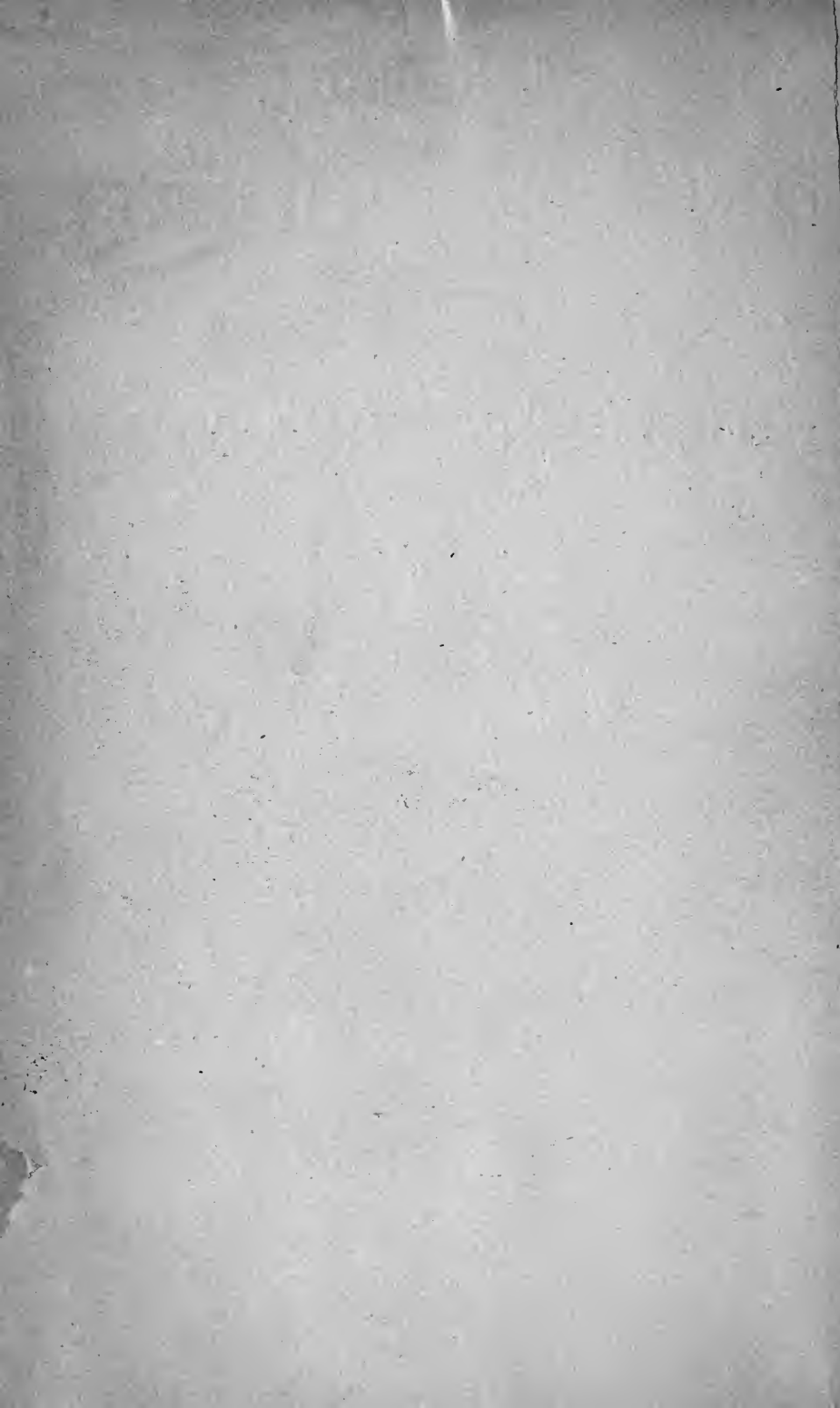
FREDERICK BINGHAM.

London :

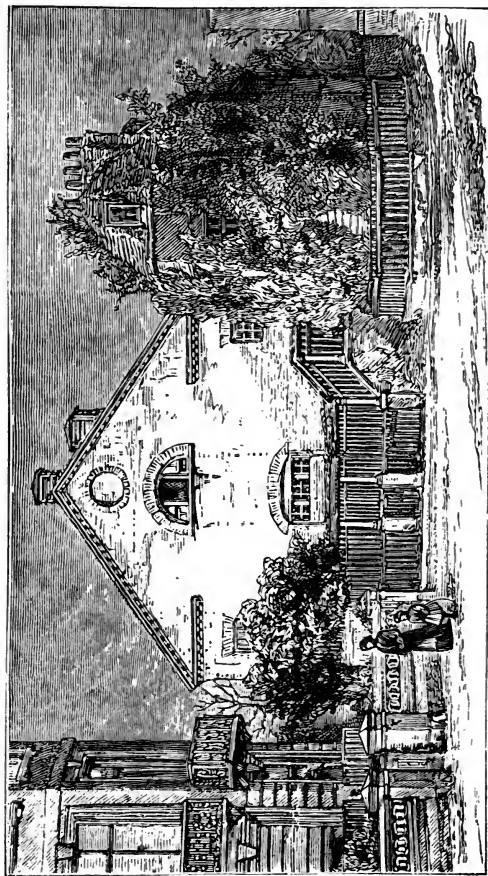
HENRY VICKERS, 317, STRAND, W.C.

Richmond-on-Thames :

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A CELEBRATED
OLD PLAYHOUSE.



EXTERIOR OF THEATRE AND EDMUND KEAN'S HOUSE.

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OLD PLAYHOUSE.

THE
HISTORY OF RICHMOND THEATRE
(IN SURREY).

FROM 1765 TO 1884.

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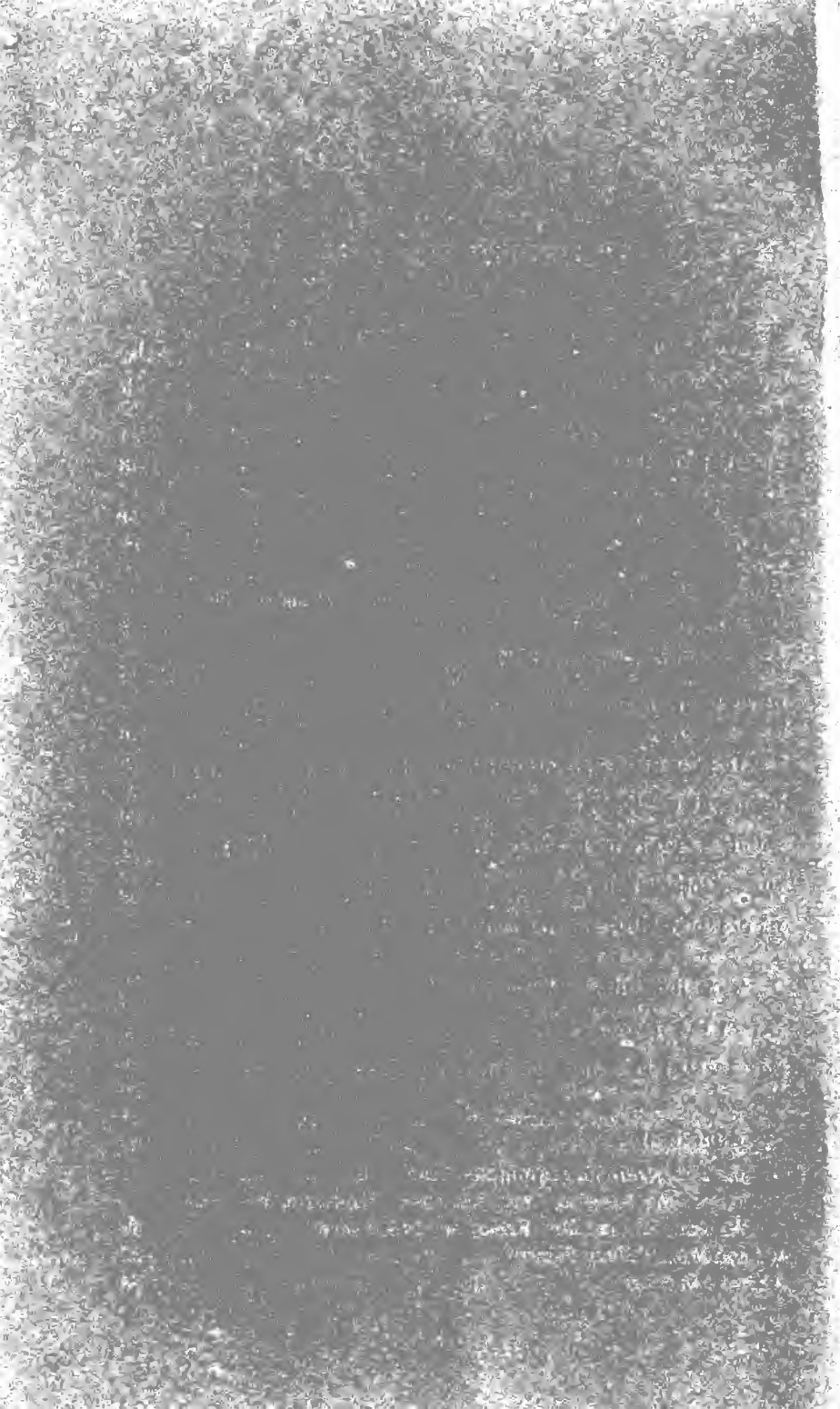
P R E F A C E .

NEARLY two years have passed away since Richmond Theatre was demolished, and when one reflects on its remarkable career, and the many brilliant memories which the bare mention of its name revives, it seems somewhat strange that a complete history of the building should not long since have been written. In presenting this little work to the public, the Compiler, whilst admitting its many imperfections, respectfully hopes that it may still be found worthy of preservation as a *souvenir* of a place of amusement with which the names of so many famous men and women are identified.

It is a fitting opportunity here to make a grateful acknowledgment of the kind way in which much important information was given by Mrs. W. Sidney, Mr. Henry Crisp, and several other ladies and gentlemen. Mr. Crisp's fine collection of old play-bills, proved especially serviceable.

The four illustrations are from sketches taken shortly before the razing of the Theatre, and may, with confidence, be accepted as being exceedingly faithful ones.

RICHMOND, SURREY,
September, 1886.



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A CELEBRATED OLD PLAYHOUSE.

AT the beginning of the second half of the last century the demand for a new theatre in Richmond had become well-nigh imperative; and considering what a favourite place of resort the village was, and that not only Royalty itself, but large numbers also of the nobility and gentry were resident there or in the vicinity, it was only natural that such should have been the case. The old theatre on the Hill, opened by Penkethman in 1719, was fast falling into decay, and such performances as were given there at irregular intervals, were, according to a record of the period, quite unworthy of the "polite and brilliant" audiences which assembled. A remedy for this unsatisfactory state of things was at length forthcoming through the enterprise of one Love, a London actor of note and particularly celebrated for his impersonation of Sir John Falstaff. The real name of this gentleman was James Dance, and from a memoir of him published in a magazine of the year 1772, it appears that he was the son of a wealthy city architect, had been educated at Westminster School and Cambridge University, and that "with the assistance of his uncle he built a theatre at Richmond for which he afterwards got a patent."

It was on Saturday, June 15th, 1765, that the doors of this building (designated as "The New Theatre on Richmond Green"), were "by authority" thrown open for the admission of a gratified public. The event is duly recorded in the *St. James' Chronicle* of the 18th day of the month and year just mentioned

under the heading of "Intelligence Extraordinary" and the programme consisted of the comic opera, "Love in a Village" (a very happy title, for *Love* indeed *was* in a village), a farce, dancing, and the delivery, by the manager, of a prologue written for the occasion by David Garrick, as follows:—

The ship now launched with necessities stored,
Rigged, manned, well built, and a rich freight on board,
All ready, tight and trim from head to poop,
And *by commission* made a *Royal Sloop*,
May Heaven from tempests, rocks, and privateers
Preserve *the Richmond*, give her boys three cheers.

(*Three huzzas behind.*)

Queen *Mab*, our *Shakespeare* says, and I believe him,
In sleep haunts each vain mortal to deceive him ;
As in her hazel nut she lightly trips,
By turns o'er eyes, ears, fingers, nose, and lips,
Each quicken'd sense such sweet enchantment seizes,
We hear, see, smell, taste, touch—whate'er she pleases.
Look round this house, and various proof you'll see,
Strong glaring proofs that *Mab* has been with me.
She caught me napping, knew where I was vain,
And tickled every fibre of my brain ;
Deep in my musing (deep as I was able)
Methought I saw her driving tow'ards my table,
She whisked her chariot o'er my books and shelves
And at my standish stopp'd her tiny elves :
What are you scribbling there?—quick, let me see !
Poh !—leave this nonsense and along with me !
I grinning bow'd—*Bright star of Lilliput*,
Shall I not crowd you in your hazel hut ?
She smil'd and showing me a large-siz'd hamper,
Get into this, my friend, and then we'll scamper ;
I for this frolic wanting quick digestion,
Sent to my tongue, post haste, another question ;
But crack she went, before that I could ask it,
She in her stage,—I, *Falstaff*, in the basket,
She wav'd her hand, then burst in fits of laughter,
To see me rowling, bounding, tumbling after ;
And I laugh'd too.—Could you of laughing fail
To see a minnow towing of a whale ?

At last we rested on a hill hard by,
 With a sweet vale to feast the glutton eye :
I'll show you more, she said, *to charm and move us*,
 And to the gardens, quick as thought, she drove us ;
 Then pointing to the shade—there, there they are,
Of this most happy isle the happiest pair.
 Oh ! may these virtuous raptures never cease,
 Nor public cares disturb their private peace !
 She sigh'd, and like the lightning was she seen
 To drive her chariot o'er this fav'rite green ;
 Strait to this spot—where she infus'd such things
 Might turn the heads of twenty playhouse kings.
 But fear dispersing all my golden dream,
 And I just entering on this fairy-scheme ;
 With wild surprise I cast my eyes about,
 Delusion ends—and now I wake to doubt :
 O may the dream be realiz'd by you,
 Your smiles or frowns can make this false or true.

This prologue was received with every demonstration of approval, and, by particular desire, Mr. Love repeated it on the following evening.

This opening of a new playhouse in the historical suburb of Richmond excited the greatest interest in theatrical circles, and the structure, designed and built by Mr. Sanderson, of Drury Lane, was considered to be a marvel of elegance and completeness. "In it," says a newspaper of the day, "every imperfection in either of the Royal theatres of Drury Lane or Covent Garden is carefully avoided, and every advantage retained; the boxes form a kind of crescent, which renders them commodious; the lobby is as spacious as either of the above theatres; there is but one gallery, which, however, turns out to the advantage of the audience, as it prevents the necessity of having pillars which obstruct the view. The pite is small, but that seems no inconveniency, as the principal part of the spectators occupy the boxes; a handsome space is allowed for the orchestra; and the panels, in place of being ornamented with a gingerbread stucco, are painted of a dark colour, which gives the stage an additional degree of light when the curtain

is drawn up. The scenes are elegant, and by the connoisseurs the whole is reckoned for its size to be much the best constructed theatre in the British dominions."

The foregoing account will scarcely be realised by those who knew the theatre only in its later years, but there is no doubt it is substantially correct. Probably neither money nor pains were spared to make the building as handsome and complete in every detail as possible, for from the first it was meant to secure, as it eventually did, the patronage of Royalty. The prologue tells us the Richmond was "by commission, made a Royal sloop," and in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1766, there are also some verses bearing on the subject, the first three of which are quoted below, the poem being headed:—

RALPH PLOUGHSHARE'S DESCRIPTION OF RICHMOND PLAYHOUSE.

Where, Hodge, ye great oaf, ha' ye been,
That ye ha' not yet been to the Play?
The Playhouse at Richmond I mean,
Which, i' feath, is most gallant and gay.
Tho' show-folk we've seen afore now
Enact kings and queens in a barn;
They've there got a palace, I vow,
And a costly one, too, as I learn.
I stared, as you'll think, all about,
To see such a wonderful thing;
But I found, when the secret came out,
'Twas design'd to be fit for the King.

Notwithstanding all this, and the fact that a first-class company from Drury Lane and Covent Garden was engaged, including Messrs. Dibdin, Fawcett, Packer, Bransby, Mrs. Lee, Mrs. Stephens, Mrs. Cross, and Mrs. Love, the first season, which ended in September, was not an extraordinarily successful one, although supported moderately well by the gentry, some of whom subscribed for the first ten plays, paying one guinea and a half for the boxes, and a guinea for the pit. The ordinary prices of admission, be it said, were—boxes, 4s.; pit, 2s. 6d.; gallery, 1s.

The theatre re-opened on 31st May, 1766, the stage having been enlarged and other improvements effected in the interim, under the superintendence, probably, of Garrick, at that time living at Hampton. "The Beggar's Opera" and "The Mayor of Garratt" were the opening pieces, together with dancing by Signor and Signora Giorgi. Many celebrated plays were performed during the season, in addition to a pantomime, "Harlequin Mountebank," in which the Drury Lane clown, Ackman, appeared. The company engaged included Love, Baddeley, Dibdin, Bannister, Fawcett, and Keasberry; Mrs. Hopkins, Mrs. Stephens, Miss Pearce, Mrs. Love, and last, but not least, Mrs. Baddeley, of whom the poet wrote:—

. . . . the gentle Baddeley, whose form,
Sweet as her voice, can never fail to charm.

This beautiful actress, *née* Sophia Snow, some years later, was fated to die at Edinburgh in an extreme state of poverty, degradation, and decay. During this season, also, Mr. Cautherley, said to have been a son of Garrick's, appeared as Romeo and Hamlet, Mrs. Baddeley being his Juliet and Ophelia. It is worthy of note that on Saturday, Sept. 20th, the night after the new theatre closed, there was a special performance given at the Old Playhouse on the Hill, for the benefit of a Mr. Davis, when Messrs. Lewis, Palmer ("Plausible Jack," the original Joseph Surface), Weston, Nelson, Murden; Mrs. McGeorge, Mrs. Worley, and Mrs. Weston appeared in Samuel Foote's two plays, "The Liar" and "The Commissary," the theatre being "well aired and fitted up in a proper manner" for the reception of those ladies and gentlemen who honoured the *beneficiaire* with their presence.

Although, with a view of showing under what conditions Richmond Theatre commenced its career, a minute account has been given of the first two seasons, the limits of this pamphlet would, by no means, permit of our following the fortunes of the house year by year. Only the more important epochs of its existence can be dwelt upon at any length; the intervening periods must be passed over "by leaps and bounds." Accord-

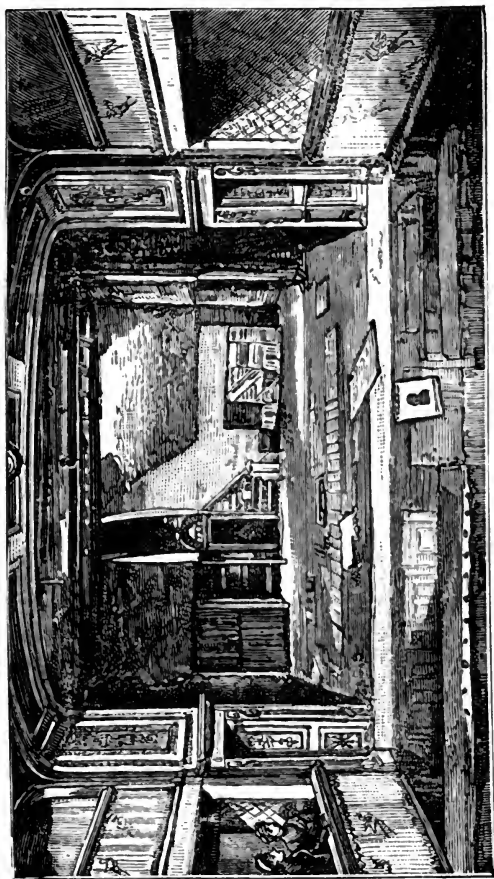
ingly we now proceed to that memorable occasion when its performances were first honoured by the presence of Royalty, in the persons of George III. and Queen Charlotte, who, accompanied by various other members of the Royal Family, were present in great state. The house was not only crowded to excess, but many people were unable to obtain admission, and had to be contented with paying their money merely for a peep at the august party through the small, glazed, circular apertures of the opposite box-door. Even this gratification was of short duration, for no person was allowed to look for more than two or three minutes. Perhaps the king (who had played himself in a private performance of Addison's "Cato" at Leicester House, when only eleven years old) little thought as he sat that night watching the actors on the stage before him, that the time would come when a descendant of his would also appear on those boards as an amateur actor. Of this we shall speak later on. His Majesty visited the theatre on several occasions subsequent to the one in question, thus setting an example which was followed for many years by a large number of distinguished personages of all ranks from Royalty downwards. Amongst those who had the honour of appearing before the king at Richmond was Quick, then a resident in the town.

In the summer of 1789, John Edwin, the actor, opened the theatre and covered himself with distinction by introducing the famous Mrs. Jordan to Richmond audiences. This lady, who was then at the height of her popularity and in the bloom of early womanhood, made her first appearance on the 29th June, playing Sir Harry Wildair in the "Constant Couple," and the Romp in the afterpiece of that name. According to Boaden, she was announced by Edwin in an occasional prologue, two lines of which were:—

My next vast merit I must have a word on—

Ecod ! d'ye know—I've got you Mistress Jordan.

"And then," continues Boaden, "he (Edwin) notices her leg, her ankle, foot, and promises the girls a kiss of Sir Harry." Mrs. Jordan acted at Richmond many times in succeeding years,



THE STAGE FROM THE AUDITORIUM.



and there are several patriarchal playgoers still living in the town who remember her well, and the intense interest her appearances always excited. In the course of conversation, a gentleman, now in his eighty-fifth year, recently told us he recollected Mrs. Jordan's living at Bushy, and that he had often seen the Duke of Clarence drive her over to the theatre in an open carriage. It was the Duke's custom to deposit the lady at the stage door, and then take his place in the box reserved for him, to await the conclusion of the performance, when the carriage would again be in requisition to carry himself and the actress back to Bushy. This same gentleman also mentions a *fracas*, which took place one night in one of the passages leading to the "slips" of the theatre, when Colonel Fitz-Clarence, afterwards Earl of Munster (son of the Duke of Clarence and Mrs. Jordan), drew his sword on a young inhabitant of the town, in consequence of some dispute, not unconnected with a member of the fair sex. For this little *escapade* the Colonel was brought before the magistrates and mulcted in the sum of five pounds.

Another appearance of Mrs. Jordan's at Richmond Theatre was in the character of a spectator, she and the Duke being present on the night of September 8th, 1793, when Charles Mathews, the elder, made his *début* in public as the Earl of Richmond, in "Richard the Third," paying the manager seven guineas and a half for the privilege. That appearance, and the principal feature of it, his terrific combat with his friend Litchfield, the "Richard" of the evening, is most amusingly related by Mathews himself in his *Life and Correspondence*, as follows:—"It so happened that I had a passion for fencing which nothing could overcome, and this friend of Melpomene and mine learned the exercise at the same academy with myself. Therefore for the delight of my exhibiting my skill and legitimate love of the art, I kindly consented to take the inferior insipid part of Richmond, who does not appear till the fifth act of the play, I stipulating, however, for a good part in the after-piece. I cared for nothing except the last scene of Richard, but

in that I was determined to have my full swing of carte and tierce. I had no idea of paying seven guineas and a half without indulging my passion. In vain did the tyrant try to die after a decent time; in vain did he give indications of exhaustion. I would not allow him to give in. I drove him by main force from any position convenient for his last dying speech. The audience laughed—I heeded them not. They shouted—I was deaf. Had they hooted, I should have lunged on in unconsciousness of their interruption. I was resolved to show them all my accomplishments. Litchfield frequently whispered ‘Enough,’ but I thought with Macbeth—‘Damn’d be he who first cries ‘Hold, enough!’ I kept him at it, and I believe we almost fought literally ‘an hour by Shrewsbury clock.’ To add to the merriment a matter-of-fact fellow in the gallery, who in his innocence took everything for reality, and who was completely wrapped up and lost by ‘the very cunning of the scene,’ shouted out at last, ‘Hang it, why don’t he shoot him?’ The Duke of Clarence was in a private box with Mrs. Jordan on the occasion, having been attracted from Bushy by the announcement of an amateur Richard, and I heard afterwards that they were both in convulsions of laughter at the prolongation of the scene, which that fascinating and first-rate of all great comic actresses never forgot. . . . The farce was ‘The Son-in-law,’ in which, having convinced the good people of Richmond that I could fence, and in the character of Bowket (in the farce) that I was *maitre de danse*, I satisfied them that my musical education had not been neglected.” Such is the elder Mathews’s account of his first performance before the British public on the boards of Richmond Theatre.

The 10th September, 1791, witnessed the appearance of the elder Macready as Marplot in “The Busybody,” and eleven nights later the famous “Dick” Suett made his bow to the Richmond public for the first time, playing Skirmish in “The Deserter;” “Plausible Jack” Palmer also appearing on the same evening in a favourite comedy. On Sept. 20th, 1795, two stars of magnitude appeared in the persons of Joseph

Shepherd Munden the comedian and Incedon the vocalist. The former played in "The Castle of Andalusia," and both took part in a musical entertainment called "The Poor Soldier," while between the pieces Incedon sang "The Storm" and "The Heaving of the Lead."

The next manager of the Theatre we can find any mention of after Edwin is Mr. William Roxby Beverley, father of Mr. William Beverley, the eminent scenic artist of the present day. The chief event of importance in Mr. Beverley's time was the appearance of Mrs. Siddons, and by way of chronicling this event we cannot do better than quote a paragraph which we came across in a newspaper for the month of October, 1807, as follows:—"Mrs. Siddons, in compliance with the repeated solicitations of several families of distinction in Richmond and its neighbourhood, has at length consented to perform there for one night (Wednesday next, the 14th inst.). The character selected is Lady Randolph in the tragedy of "Douglas:" a better choice could not have been made to display the various powers of this great actress. It will be her first as well as only appearance at this theatre, and we congratulate the inhabitants on the prospect of so high a treat." There is another incident in Mr. Beverley's day well worthy of notice. Mr. Henry Crisp has a programme in his collection dated Sept. 4th, 1811, wherein a performance of "Romeo and Juliet" is announced, the part of the hero to be played "by an Amateur." This was no less a personage than the eccentric "Romeo" Coates, the "celebrated and philanthropic amateur of fashion," as he was styled in some of the play bills of the period.

And now let us turn to the management of Mr. Klanert, which lasted many years, during which the Playhouse, as the late Mr. Richard Crisp remarks in his history of Richmond, was "in the zenith of its popularity with the gentry and nobility of the town and surrounding neighbourhood." "How pleasant to recall to our memory," continues this gentleman, writing in 1866, "those evenings when so many members of the gentry and nobility of this place might be seen around that one tier of

boxes, heartily enjoying the entertainment provided for them, and at the conclusion of the performances, separating thoroughly gratified with the evening's amusement. How well can we recollect when, on state occasions, there would be a 'bespeak,' and the Duke and Duchess of Clarence would occasionally honour the theatre with their presence, how at different periods of the season, the names of those who were almost as household words among us, would appear on the heading of the 'Bill of the Play' as the patrons for the night." Another chronicler, writing in the year 1825, expressed himself as being of opinion that there was not, at that time, a prettier little theatre in the kingdom. He also remarked upon Klanert's praiseworthy efforts to please the public by introducing the best of actors and the novelties of the London theatres. As an instance of this spirited policy may be mentioned his securing the occasional appearance of Edmund Kean, the king of English tragedians, at a very large nightly salary. On the first occasion of his playing (in 1817) he was mysteriously announced in the bills as "Mr. K.," for he was then under an engagement which bound him to appear at Covent Garden Theatre only. However, the Richmond public seemed to have been acquainted with the identity of "Mr. K." well enough, for a very large sum of money was taken at the doors.

We have recently seen a fac-simile of a letter written by Kean to Mr. Klanert, which runs thus:

"My Dear Sir,

"I have the greatest respect for you, and the best wishes for your professional success, but if I play in the Richmond Theatre again—I'll be damned.

"EDMUND KEAN."

"Klanert, Esq."

This was written from the Castle Hotel late on the night of October 14th, 1818, in answer to a note from Klanert asking the actor to name the date of his next performance at Richmond. Kean had been much annoyed that

evening because during the progress of "Richard III." the audience had insisted on applauding the other performers as well as himself. His anger, however, was of short duration, for a week or two later he played Orestes in "The Distressed Mother" for the benefit of a fellow-actor who had fallen on evil times.

Another incident in connection with these performances is well worth relating, as it exhibits in a marked degree the self-possession and determination under trying circumstances so characteristic of this truly remarkable man. Through failing one evening in the autumn of 1827 to put in an appearance as announced, he got into disgrace with the playgoers of Richmond. Accordingly, when a few nights later it was again given out that he would appear, a very hostile audience assembled for the purpose of giving the offending actor a significant token of its disapproval of his recent bad conduct. On arriving at the stage door from London, and being informed of the reception awaiting him, Kean said to his coachman, "Tom, stay here with the carriage for fifteen minutes, and if I do not return in that time, you may go and put up the horses, but not before." Then he turned round on the astonished Klanert and said, "Now I tell you what, if the audience think proper to be quiet, I will exert myself so that they shall not have witnessed such a performance before perhaps in their lives. I will give them just five minutes from the time I appear on the stage, to determine the matter; and if in that time the uproar does not cease, I shall leave immediately for London." On being made acquainted with this resolve, the good folks in front became, if possible, more irate than ever, and when the object of their wrath walked calmly on the stage in his everyday costume, the clamour was deafening. Nothing daunted, the imperturbable tragedian pulled out his watch and stood calmly confronting the sea of angry faces before him, waiting for the five minutes to expire. And by the time they had, Kean was absolute master of the situation. The roar of many voices had given place, as if by magic, to a perfect silence, so that the conventional pin might have been heard to

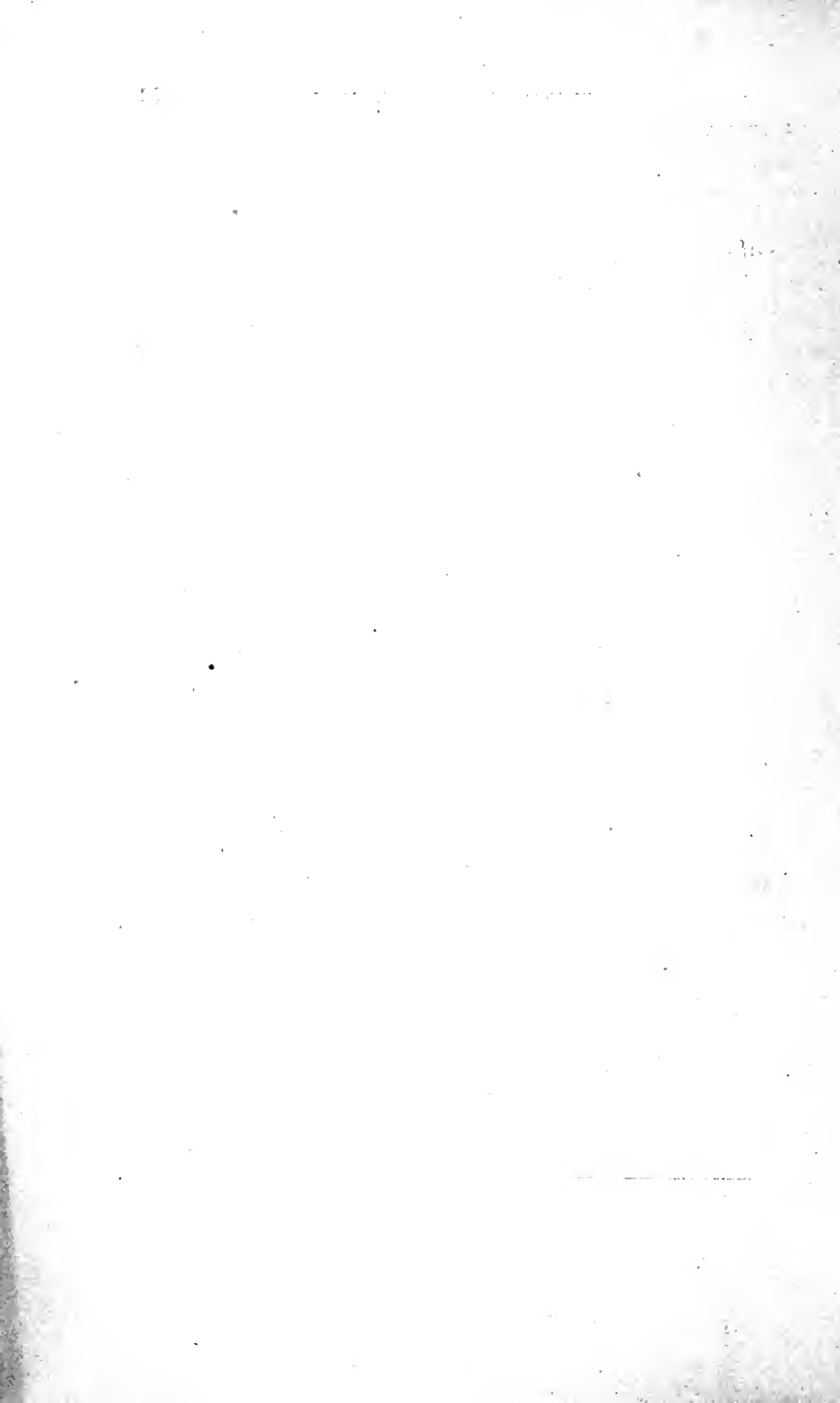
fall. And then the plucky actor donned his theatrical habiliments and gave the audience a performance "such as they had not witnessed before perhaps in their lives."

Three other famous members of the dramatic profession who appeared under Klanert's auspices were Miss O'Neill, Maria Foote, and John Liston. The former played Mrs. Beverley in "The Gamester" for the benefit of a Mr. Glassington on Tuesday, Nov. 10th, 1818, the Beverley being Klanert himself. Miss Foote appeared several times during various seasons, and was ever a great attraction. We quote the following paragraph from the *Dramatic Magazine* for November, 1829, which, alluding to Richmond, says: "The theatrical season here, if we may judge from appearances, has been a successful one. Miss Foote's last performance drew a house of eighty pounds, which is as much as has been taken on any occasion since the never-to-be-forgotten Mrs. Jordan was here." Liston delighted the frequenters of the theatre by his performance of that great creation of his, Paul Pry. He played this part, together with that of Neddy Bray, in the farce of "X.Y.Z." on Sept. 2nd, 1827, while on the 24th of the same month he performed Mawworm in "The Hypocrite" and Sam Savory in "Fish out of Water."

In the year 1831, Edmund Kean, in fast-decaying health, alienated from his wife and son, and with the splendid spirit which had sustained him in his conflicts with adverse fortune completely broken down, became lessee of Richmond Theatre, taking up his residence during the various seasons in the little dwelling-place adjoining the Theatre, known in later days as Waverley House. It was apparent to all who then saw him that his days were numbered—that his "brilliant meteoric and yet stormy career was evidently drawing to a mournful and premature close." Nevertheless, his opening of the Theatre created an overwhelming excitement in the town and neighbourhood, and, at first, the people crowded the place whenever he appeared. But by degrees the novelty wore off, and large audiences became, at times, conspicuous by their absence; some-



ROOM IN WHICH EDMUND KEAN DIED.



times he is said to have appeared in his favourite pieces to houses of no more than five pounds—on one occasion even so low a sum as three pounds sixteen shillings was all the money taken. This disastrous state of things is accounted for by the fact that he played too frequently. He was led into making this grave mistake by the state of his finances, which was, at the time, anything but satisfactory. We have a melancholy example of his poverty in the last two or three years of his life, in the purse which was found in his pocket after his death—*empty*, and which was recently presented to Mr. Henry Irving by Mr. Robert Browning.

During his two years' tenancy of Richmond Theatre Kean appeared in all his favourite characters, and amongst those who formed his company were Mrs. Selby, who played most of the leading female characters, and Benjamin Webster, then a young and struggling actor. It had been the custom of some of the Richmond managers to give a prize wherry every year to be rowed for by the watermen, and on the afternoon of Friday, August 10th, 1832, the ninth of these competitions was instituted by Kean. In the evening was produced at the Theatre a new ballet, composed expressly for the occasion, "The Tenth of August; or, the Jolly Lad that Won the Wherry;" at the conclusion of which the prize boat was introduced on the stage and presented to the successful competitors, "Rule Britannia" being sung by the whole of the company. The hero of the piece, the "Jolly Lad," was enacted by Mr. Webster.

Of Edmund Kean's private life in Richmond, as Hawkins remarks, "It would not be going too far to say he was universally loved and respected." His society was eagerly courted by all classes, and in such circles as he permitted himself to mix, his kindly nature and his fine powers of conversation made him the first of favourites. His mode of passing the time was quiet and peaceful in the extreme. "In the morning, if not confined to his room by illness, he might be seen walking slowly and painfully across the Green which lay in front of his residence,

and ever and anon stopping to rest himself upon the agate-handled stick with which he used at all times to appear as Sir Giles Overreach, and which had been presented in years gone by his favourite Marall, the inimitable 'Joey' Munden." And then, followed by the compassionate glances of the townspeople, he would slowly ascend the Hill, there to bask in the afternoon sun, to enjoy the invigorating breeze, and to delightedly survey the magnificent panorama of the Thames valley, which lay beneath in all its beauty. He was also fond of a pull up the river in his pleasure boat, floating back gently with the tide in communion with one of his favourite authors. On such evenings as he did not appear on the stage, he would either spend his time quietly at home amusing himself with his books or music, or else he would pass an hour or two at the "Castle" in company with a few choice spirits. Sometimes a party of friends would run down from London, and, says Paul Bedford in his "Recollections," "nothing gave him more pleasure than a visit from his select ones. I remember, on one occasion, the party assembled were Surgeon Carpue, Andrew Ducrow, John Cooper, G. Stansbury, Lee, Hughes, Mrs. Glover, and the Jackdaw boy (myself). In the course of the evening Mrs. Glover said, 'Now, Edmund, give us a treat by repeating to us the Litany and the Lord's Prayer. I shall never forget the impression it made on me when I first heard you read it, Edmund.' He consented, and had the delivery of those sacred words been heard by our ecclesiastical brethren, it would have proved to them a lesson in elocution beyond all price."

Occasionally Kean would gratify London playgoers with a performance, riding to town in a post-chaise and returning to his cottage after the performance. "To and from Richmond he occasionally travelled," says a writer, "a feeble bundle of humanity, that seemed to lie unconsciously in one corner of the carriage. But I think that conscience was there too, and rage and remorse that a life had been so wasted, and powers almost as divine as the poet's, so irretrievably abused." The actor's closing years were certainly terribly embittered by the pangs of

remorse. His medical attendant, Dr. Smith, of Richmond, relates an affecting story, of how they surprised Kean one evening at the piano, with his head bowed down on the instrument, the keys of which were wet with tears.

His death occurred on the 15th May, 1833. There is a curious incident narrated of his last moments by Paul Bedford, who says, "I was invited by my associate John Lee to take a last look at our lamented one; and before the arrival of the learned ones of anatomy (Bedford here alludes to Surgeon Carpue and others who made a *post-mortem* examination of the deceased), I was taken to the chamber of sorrow. Stretched on his humble couch lay the remains of the world's admiration—the body being ungarmented, awaiting the operation of the skilful surgical knife. On looking on the remains of the dear departed, I observed on the left knee a large blackened bruise. Inquiring of my friend Lee the cause of the blemish, he told me that having attended the bedside of the suffering one for many an anxious night, and being, on one occasion, overcome by sleep, he was awakened by hearing him utter the well-known passage from the tent scene in 'Richard,' 'A horse! a horse! My kingdom for a horse!' and at that moment he sprang off the couch, falling on his knees, which produced the discolouration of the limb. That event occurred about two hours before the final moment. It was the farewell dream of his earthly greatness." Such were the last moments of Edmund Kean, who began life under its lowliest aspects, and by dint of his matchless genius forced his way into the foremost rank of English actors. Truly, in the words of Handel's beautiful composition, which was sung in the parish church of Richmond at the conclusion of the funeral ceremonies, "His body is buried in peace, but his name shall live for evermore."

A month after his death, June 24th, 1833, Kean's furniture, theatrical and private wardrobe, together with various other property were sold by auction on the stage at Richmond by Mr. George Robins. A copy of the catalogue of this sale, which

belonged to the great actor's administrators and in which the prices realised are marked, is now in the possession of a gentleman residing in Richmond. From this a few of the most interesting items are extracted, as follow:—

An excellent 5-feet japanned French bedstead, lath bottom, with pole and white dimity hangings, £1 15s.

(As this is the only article of its kind mentioned, it must have been the bed on which Kean breathed his last.)

A travelling cap, gloves, ruff, and night cap, the last articles worn by Mr. Kean, 14s.

Eighteen volumes of plays, bound and lettered, with the deceased actor's favourite parts, having written memoranda of the stage business, &c., £7 4s.

The agate-handled stick presented to Kean by Munden [as previously mentioned], £3.

Richard the Third's dress, with splendid crimson silk velvet robe richly trimmed, with gilt spangles, truncheon, crown, and head-piece, £5 10s.

The Order of St. George and the Dragon worn in Richard the Third and presented by the widow of David Garrick, £1 10s.

Richard the Third's wig, £1.

The total amount realised was £402 4s. 5d. What would such a precious collection of relics be worth *now*? Looking at the catalogue one would have no hesitation in saying nearer four thousand pounds than four hundred.

The lesseeship of the theatre now devolved upon Mr. Willis-Jones, a gentleman of fortune, with histrionic aspirations, whose name is deserving of more than a mere passing remembrance, from the fact that to him, indirectly, the English stage is indebted for one of its greatest modern actresses, Miss Helen Faucit. This lady, whom to-day we know as Lady Martin, in a series of articles on "Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters," gives a full account of her *début* at Richmond Theatre, and the events leading up thereto. It appears that Miss Faucit's family was in the habit of passing a certain number of months each summer in a house on Richmond Green, and here the future great exponent of Shakespeare's heroines, then a young girl at

school, always spent her holidays. The beauties of the town and neighbourhood, that have delighted so many thousands of people, could scarcely have failed to charm one so full of poetic sensibility as Helen Faucit. In company with her sister, she roamed the whole country round, ever finding some new beauty to delight in and admire. Two of these rambles were productive of a like number of noteworthy incidents in her life. One was her first and only meeting with Edmund Kean, whom she and her sister encountered one day taking the air (after many days of sickness), in company with his aunt, Miss Tidswell, and to whom, seated under a spreading tree on the ancient Green, she, her timidity having been overcome by the gentleness of the worn actor, prattled away artlessly of her school life, her favourite pursuits and other girlish topics, until she had to be stopped for fear she should "fatigue the invalid." Even then Kean would not let her go until she had promised to come to him and repeat a piece of poetry, for the recitation of which she had just received a prize. Alas! ere that visit could be paid, he who had desired it had passed away.

The second incident occurred at a later period. Helen and her sister were making their way to the riverside one hot afternoon, and having to pass the stage-door of the theatre, which was generally left open in the day-time, they walked in, for the building, if gloomy-looking, was delightfully cool and refreshing after the heat outside. A balcony and flight of steps were arranged on the stage, and in a sudden frolic the two girls went through a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, unwitnessed, as they thought, by mortal eyes. They were mistaken. Ensconced in a corner of one of the boxes in the auditorium, hidden from view by the prevailing darkness, was Mr. Willis-Jones, the lessee, who witnessed the impromptu performance in wonderment, and was so taken with Helen's *Juliet*, that he afterwards waited on her friends and asked them to permit her to play the part in public on the stage of his theatre. This, with great reluctance, was assented to, and accordingly in November, 1833, Miss Helen Faucit made her *début* in the part mentioned, being modestly

announced as "A Young Lady: her first appearance on any stage." She attired herself for the play in the little cottage parlour where Kean had also dressed and sat, and where the dead tragedian had wept as he brooded on his wasted health and strength. In this room she first made acquaintance with that dreadful malady known as "stage-fright," and here, with the music of the overture ringing in her ears, she begged to be left alone for a short time that she might "more freely seek for the help which all so suddenly she seemed to need more than ever she could have guessed." The performance itself, threatened with failure at the outset, through the terror of the inexperienced girl, was, as the world knows, a triumph seldom achieved by one so young, and Miss Helen Faucit's future was settled.

And now we have before us a term of years in the history of Richmond Theatre which must be dealt with as concisely as possible, otherwise this little pamphlet would swell into a work of about three volumes. How long Mr. Jones' tenancy lasted we are unable to say, but in 1836 Mr. Davenport, the original stage manager of the new Strand Theatre and proprietor of the Theatre Royal, Chichester, assumed the responsibilities of management, opening on August 13th with a stock company selected from the Bath and Chichester Theatres, the leading parts being played by the manager himself, his wife, and their daughter. The latter young lady, who was only nine years old, appeared in such parts as Richard III. and Shylock, in the former of which characters she, according to the play-bill, wore a hat "presented to her by the greatest Richard of modern times." The "stars" who appeared during the season were Mrs. Nisbett and her sisters, the two Miss Mordaunts; Ramo Samee, the celebrated East Indian conjurer and juggler; and T. Blanchard, from Drury Lane and Covent Garden, who appeared in conjunction with Signor Martini, whose marvellous feats had raised doubts in the public mind whether he was a monkey or a man. Of the plays produced we mention the following, because of the quaint manner in which they are announced in the bills. On Monday, September 12th, was presented "the celebrated, moral,

and highly instructive play, which the manager makes a point of acting once every season, called 'George Barnwell ;' " and on the following Monday our old friend " Maria Martin " was proclaimed as being " the celebrated new play, founded on a recent murder at Polsted, ' The Red Barn,' with a correct view of the barn where the murder was perpetrated."

In 1837 Richmond Theatre was opened by a Miss Desborough, who announced that the stage would be " brilliantly lighted with gas," probably for the first time. The notabilities of this season were Messrs. Bartley, Cooper, and Meadows ; Mr. Butler, a Covent Garden tragedian of ephemeral celebrity ; Mr. J. Lee, of Drury Lane, who performed Jeremy Diddler and other favourite parts ; and Mr. Tom Matthews, the celebrated clown who, with Mr. M. Howell, played the pieces introduced the preceding season by Blanchard and Martini. The year of 1839 saw several noteworthy appearances. Mr. Betty, son of Master Betty, the Infant Roscius, played a week to very fair houses. Other notables were the Bedouin Arabs and the celebrated " Jim Crow " Rice, the founder of negro minstrelsy. In the November of the year a Mr. John Ryan, who had had a great deal to do with theatricals in Richmond during the preceding few years, took a benefit, on which occasion Charles Dickens, then residing at Woodbine Cottage, Petersham, was one of the patrons, and honoured the *beneficiaire* with his presence. Amongst the many fashionable visitors were also the Baroness Rothschild and Earl Waldegrave, and the principal actors who took part in the performance were Messrs. Buckstone, Elton, and Leman Rede, the pieces being " Hamlet " and " Our Mary Ann."

A Mr. Thompson was manager in 1840, and the services of a talented London company were secured. In 1842 Mr. and Mrs. Creswick played a very successful engagement, and in the following year Mr. Charles Kean several times appeared on the boards trodden by his illustrious father. On some occasions he (Charles) attracted good houses, on others his engagement was an utter failure, the receipts being much less than the sum paid him for his professional services. During this year also the

Duke of Cambridge patronised a performance of "The Lady of Lyons." In 1844 there appeared for one night only (a benefit) Mr. Howe, Mr. H. Widdicombe, and Tom Matthews, who on this occasion sang "Tippetywitchet," and danced his celebrated imitation of Duvernay's Cachouca. The same year witnessed a performance of "Martin Chuzzlewit," then being played to crowded houses at the Lyceum and Strand Theatres.

From 1845 to 1849 Richmond Theatre is said to have remained closed. In the latter year Mr. John Ryan became lessee, and opened on Monday, July 9th, with great *éclat*. This season was undoubtedly a far more brilliant one than the theatre had known for years. Mr. Buckstone and Mrs. Fitzwilliam played two nights in "Green Bushes," "Rough Diamond," "An Alarming Sacrifice," "The Housekeeper," and "Box and Cox," to large and fashionable audiences. On August 6th Mr. Woolgar (Mrs. Mellon's father), who was announced as from the Birmingham and Manchester Theatres, appeared as Gloster in "Richard III." with success. On August 27th Tom Matthews played clown in a pantomimic sketch, "Harlequin and the Wishing Cap; or, Puck and the Pudding." Two evenings later, Mr. Howe, of the Haymarket, had a benefit, on which occasion Benjamin Webster, Mr. and Mrs. Keeley, Mrs. Glover, and Mr. Howe himself appeared in "Lavater," "Twice Killed," and the "Queensbury Fete." The house was a splendid one, Prince Metternich and suite being present. Mr. Ryan's first season terminated in October. On Boxing Night the theatre was opened for a few nights with "The Castle Spectre" and a pantomime, "Nature and Art; or, Harlequin Past, Present and Future," written by Nelson Lee. This was very successful, and drew large and delighted houses. In the October of the following year Mr. Ryan died.

And now we come to an era in the existence of the old playhouse which we regard with the greatest pleasure: that is to say, when it was in the hands of Mr. William Sidney. Of that gentleman's management, and afterwards of his talented wife's, nothing can be said that is not of a praiseworthy nature.

During their reign, which lasted twelve or thirteen years, Richmond Theatre enjoyed prosperity such as it had perhaps seldom done before, and which it certainly never knew afterwards. Once more were the nobility and gentry induced to assemble in the boxes of the ancient building—once more were the performances under the patronage of such august personages as the Duke and Duchess of Teck, the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland, the Duc D'Aumale, Lady Alice Peel, Baroness Windsor, the Duchess of Cambridge, and many others. Space prohibits our giving a complete list of the various stars who appeared at different times under the Sidney *regime*, but the mention of such names as Madame Celeste, Hermann Vezin, and Sothorn (who played “Dundreary”) will suffice as specimens. It should be said that the theatre had now become Crown property, having been purchased by the Queen; and Mr. Sidney was the first lessee under this new state of things. His first season commenced on August 16th, 1858, and according to a newspaper of that year, was the most successful since the days of Kean. An admirable address, written by “An Isleworth patron of the Drama,” was spoken by Mrs. Sidney, which is of sufficient interest to be reproduced here in its entirety. It is as follows:—

Patrons and friends, whose presence here to-night
 Inspires our hopes with future prospects bright,
 Who fondly trust, beneath its former dome,
 Once more to fix the English Drama's home;
 And with true British feeling seek to turn
 To the sweet streams from Shakespeare's golden urn;
 Welcome, thrice welcome, to these ancient walls
 Where ling'ring memory other time recalls,
 When fashion smiled upon our *native* stage,
 And foreign artists were not *all* the rage.
 Upon these boards which we now humbly tread,
 Our greatest actors have their genius shed;
 The Kembles, Siddons, Jordan hither came,
 To add new laurels to their deathless fame;
 Here Edmund Kean the glories of his art
 Each night to crowded houses would impart;

Here have Macready's noble accents rung,
Here have been heard the classic tones of Young ;
The gifted Webster, Buckstone and Charles Kean,
Each in his turn has graced the Richmond scene,
And all the best comedians of the day
Have here delighted with their genial ray.
Talents like these, so far beyond our rule
We cannot give ; but, students in their school,
Anxious to bring our efforts to your view,
Rewarded well by fostering smiles from you,
Our care will be, in all we offer here,
To shun each word could shock the virtuous ear ;
The moral lesson with the scene to blend
Is our true English Drama's aim and end.
Let us then hope, whilst we this course pursue,
To find our efforts gain support from you.
So may we trust in this enlighten'd age,
To renovate once more the Richmond stage ;
So may we hope to see our boxes fill
With the "sweet lasses" of fair Richmond Hill.

As we write, there lie on the desk before us several of the Sidney play-bills for the year 1869. They are of the good old-fashioned kind—bright blue letters on a white ground—and the pieces announced for representation are some that have become endeared to modern theatre-goers by long acquaintanceship ; although such plays as " East Lynne," " Leah," " The Orange Girl," " The Willow Copse," and " Jeanie Deans " were not quite so hackneyed seventeen years ago as they are now. We observe that the principal low comedian of the company at this time was Mr. Arthur Williams, who was a great favourite here.

The next lessee was Mrs. Evelyn, but nothing of any particular interest occurred during this lady's two or three years' tenancy. On May 5th, 1880, the lease of the theatre was offered for sale by auction by a local auctioneer, when it was stated that the building, with Waverley House attached, was held under an agreement from the Crown at a yearly rental of £65. Even on these very moderate terms no purchaser could be found, at the time, but shortly afterwards one was forthcoming



AUDITORIUM FROM STAGE.

whose name will presently transpire. We must first say a word or two concerning the three amateur-professional performances given under the direction of E. Claremont, Esq., of Richmond Hill—performances that will long linger pleasantly in the memories of all who had the good fortune to be present. The first, which was in aid of the Irish Famine Relief Fund, took place in the early part of the year, and consisted of Tom Taylor's comedy, "Still Waters Run Deep," and "Under the Rose." The second was given in the summer, when Cheltnam Smith's comedy, "A Lesson in Love," and "The Happy Pair" were played. The third, which took the form of a complimentary benefit to Mrs. Evelyn, had for its programme "The Area Belle," "Sweethearts," and "Uncle's Will." The list of the distinguished ladies and gentlemen who took part in these three representations were Captain Fitz-George, Major Hughes-Hallett, E. Claremont, Esq., A. Spalding, Esq., Mrs. Bernard Beere, Miss Florence Terry, Miss Cissy Graham, Miss Rose Leclercq, and Miss M. A. Giffard. It was the first-named gentleman to whom we alluded as the descendant of His Majesty King George the Third, in the beginning of these records. The gallant Captain's assumption of the characters of Babblerbrook ("The Newspaper") in "A Lesson of Love," and Mr. Barker in "Uncle's Will," exhibited comedy powers of a high order. We shall not easily forget Miss Florence Terry as Jenny Northcott in "Sweethearts," nor Mrs. Bernard Beere's Mrs. Honeyton in "A Happy Pair." Miss Rose Leclercq in "A Lesson of Love," Miss Graham as Florence Marigold in "Uncle's Will," and Miss Giffard's "Missus" in the "Area Belle," were also delightful performances. Mr. T. N. Wenman's rendering of Tossler in the last-named piece could not have been improved upon. The whole of the arrangements devolved upon Mr. Claremont, who, in addition to his fine acting as Captain Hawksley, Harry Spreadbrow, Captain Freeman, Charles Cashmore, and Mr. Honeyton, had a quantity of new scenery prepared, and the house elegantly decorated and improved on each occasion for the

reception of the large and fashionable audiences that assembled.

There was another amateur performance of quite a different kind given in the month of April of this year, which would not be mentioned here but for a laughable incident that occurred. The play was Tom Taylor's drama, "Helping Hands," in which the principal character is Lorentz Hartmann, a blind German violinist, who in the course of events has to partake of a cup of coffee. The part was a long and tiring one, and consequently its delineator thought that the business with the coffee would be a capital opportunity for imbibing a little welcome refreshment. Accordingly he had an excellent cup of the beverage in question prepared and placed at the wings in readiness. At the proper time it was brought forward with the usual concomitants of milk and sugar, and the performer, having amalgamated the ingredients, gave a shrug of satisfaction, took a large gulp of the liquid, and, having swallowed it, was about to take another, when his face assumed an expression of extreme disgust, and he rose from his seat, rushed to the wings, and expectorated largely. Of course this unrehearsed business tickled the audience immensely, but when the actor returned to his place and resumed his part, saying, "Ach, it vas goot! but it taste not mitout mein gretchen," the house burst in a roar of laughter. It subsequently transpired that some thirsty soul—probably a scene-shifter—had drunk the milk and substituted a decoction of size, whitening, and water, which scenic artists use to prepare their canvases with for painting.

The last proprietor of Richmond Theatre was Mr. John Russell, of the Criterion Theatre, the original Jeremy Crow in "Meg's Diversion," and Doggrass in Burnand's burlesque, "Black-eyed Susan." He opened his campaign with great *éclat* on the 12th July, 1880, with a good company of which the bright particular stars were Miss Nelly Farren and Mr. E. W. Royce. 'A farce, "Checkmate," and "A Young Rip Van Winkle" were the pieces. First-rate audiences filled the theatre, which had been provided with new scenery and other accessories, including the addition to the lobby of a fine-art gallery, and it

seemed as if the old playhouse had entered on a new term of life. But, alas! these hopes were doomed to disappointment! With the termination of the Farren-Royce engagement, re-awakened public interest was exhausted, and sank once more into the sleep from which it had been aroused. The mistake made by the management was, probably, not being ready with a constant succession of stars of similar calibre to the two just mentioned. Whether such a policy would have answered is a matter for conjecture, but certainly that was the only way in which the fallen fortunes of the theatre were likely to have been restored.

And from now till the end of its existence the theatre's history is a melancholy one to contemplate. Everything was tried to make it pay, but except on special occasions, the result was failure. In addition to the stock company engaged, many novelties were forthcoming in the shape of negro minstrel entertainments, panoramas, mesmerists, &c. Now and again a special morning or evening performance would be given by artistes of celebrity. Messrs. George Alexander, T. W. Robertson, R. W. Young, the Misses Maud and Fanny Robertson played in "Caste." Messrs. Lytton Sothorn, William Farren, jun., Miss Kate Rorke and Mrs. Alfred Mellon appeared in "Where's the Cat?" Miss Harriet Coveney enacted Mrs. Willoughby in "The Ticket-of-Leave Man." Several plays by well-known authors (Mr. Dion Boucicault amongst them) were also produced here without ostentation, simply for copyright purposes. But all these occurrences were merely oases in the desert of general depression that prevailed. Things went from bad to worse—that is, they would have done so, if anything being as bad as it possibly *could* be, could ever get *worse*. We were in the house one night when the curtain rose to an audience of two persons. And this is by no means a solitary instance of similarly meagre *houses*. In winter the management had an additional disadvantage to cope with, for then, unless the theatre was crowded, the cold was so intense that it required no little fortitude to sit out an entertainment, and we may add that very

few of the audience *did*. So bitter indeed was it, that the amiable and ever-smiling gentleman who formed the orchestra was under the necessity of having a small stove by his side, whereat to warm his numbed fingers in such intervals as he was not engaged in getting as much music as possible out of his instrument—a forlorn piano, which served to increase rather than relieve the general dreariness. A word concerning this solitary musician will not be out of place, for Mr. T. Berry was quite a feature of Richmond Theatre. His name will be remembered by many of the elder members of the theatrical profession, for he has been connected with the stage, in a musical capacity, all his life. As a young lad he was in the orchestra of the far-famed “Eagle” when it was under the rule of “Bravo” Rouse, and when the inimitable Frederick Robson was acting and singing his way into popular favour there. When the property passed into the hands of Mr. George Conquest, Mr. Berry became conductor of the band, remaining there altogether twelve years. He was afterwards engaged at Vauxhall Gardens and Sadler’s Wells Theatre, at the latter of which places he was seven years musical director for Miss Marriott. When Richmond Theatre was first opened by Mr. Russell a good band was engaged, with Mr. Berry at its head. But as time wore on and the receipts fell off, the number of instrumentalists gradually decreased, until at last Berry with his piano was the sole survivor. *He*, however, never deserted his post. In hot weather or cold, with salary or without, there he sat, night after night, thumping away at his instrument, with untiring energy and a cheerfulness which nothing could depress. When he appeared in the orchestra at the beginning of the evening and saw an audience of—say, half-a-dozen people, anxiously waiting for the rising of the curtain, his smile was as contented and his playing as hearty as if the house had been crowded in every part. But our admiration of this gentleman’s blithesomeness is leading us into rather too long a digression.

The last performance we attended was on the evening of a certain bank holiday, when an entertainment by music-hall

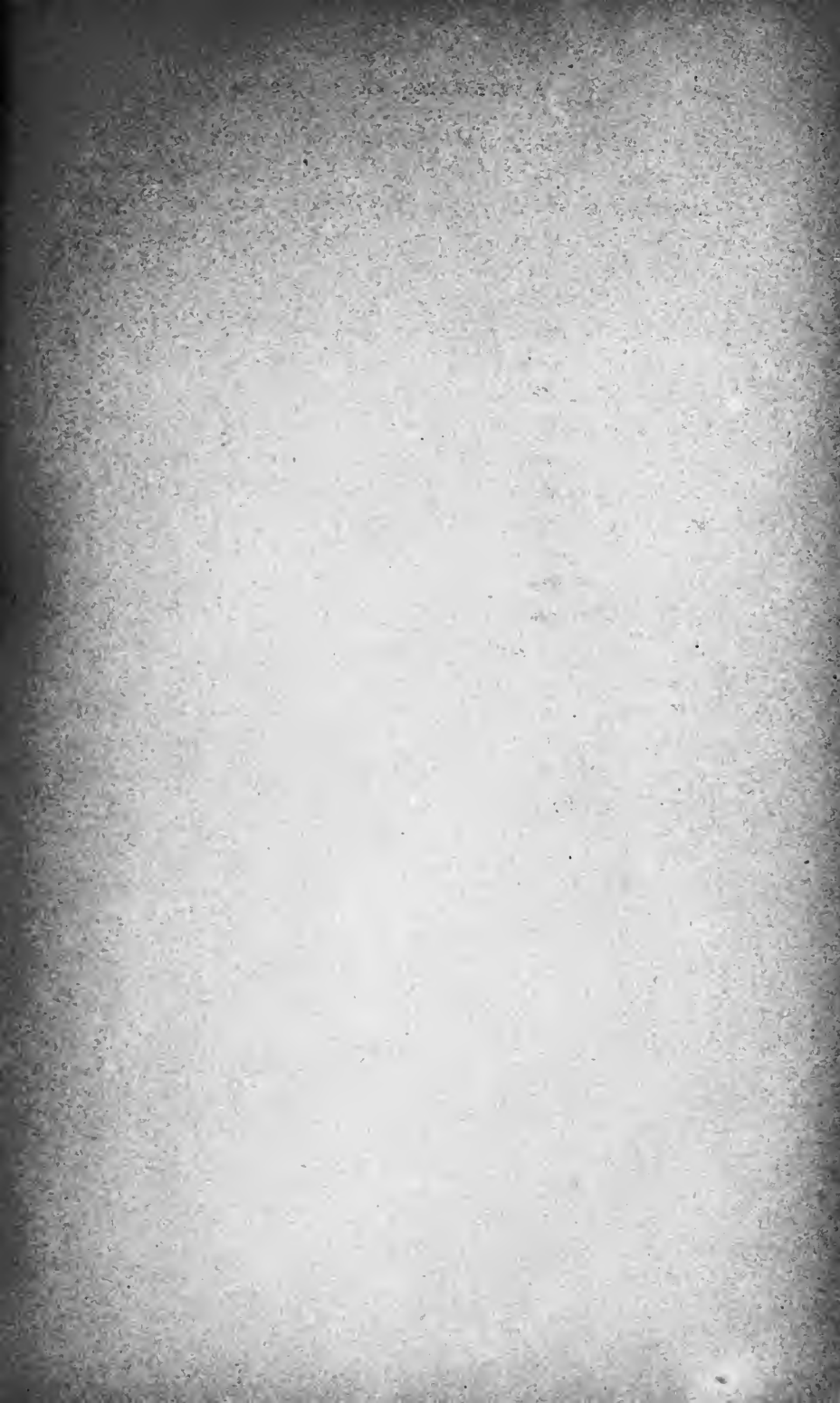
artistes was announced. Some of these "artistes" we recognised as having played in the streets of Richmond only that very afternoon, and their appearance was noticed and warmly disapproved of, even by the very boys in the gallery. One of an itinerant troupe of the burnt-cork fraternity especially came in for the derision of the audience, and his brief conversation with certain of the "gods," telling them what he would do "if he caught them outside," might have been laughable if it had not been inexpressibly painful to contemplate. The thought that a building hallowed by the memories of Kean, Jordan, Baddeley, and others, should arrive at such a pitch of desecration, was too much for our feelings, and we hastened from the theatre, never again to enter its doors.

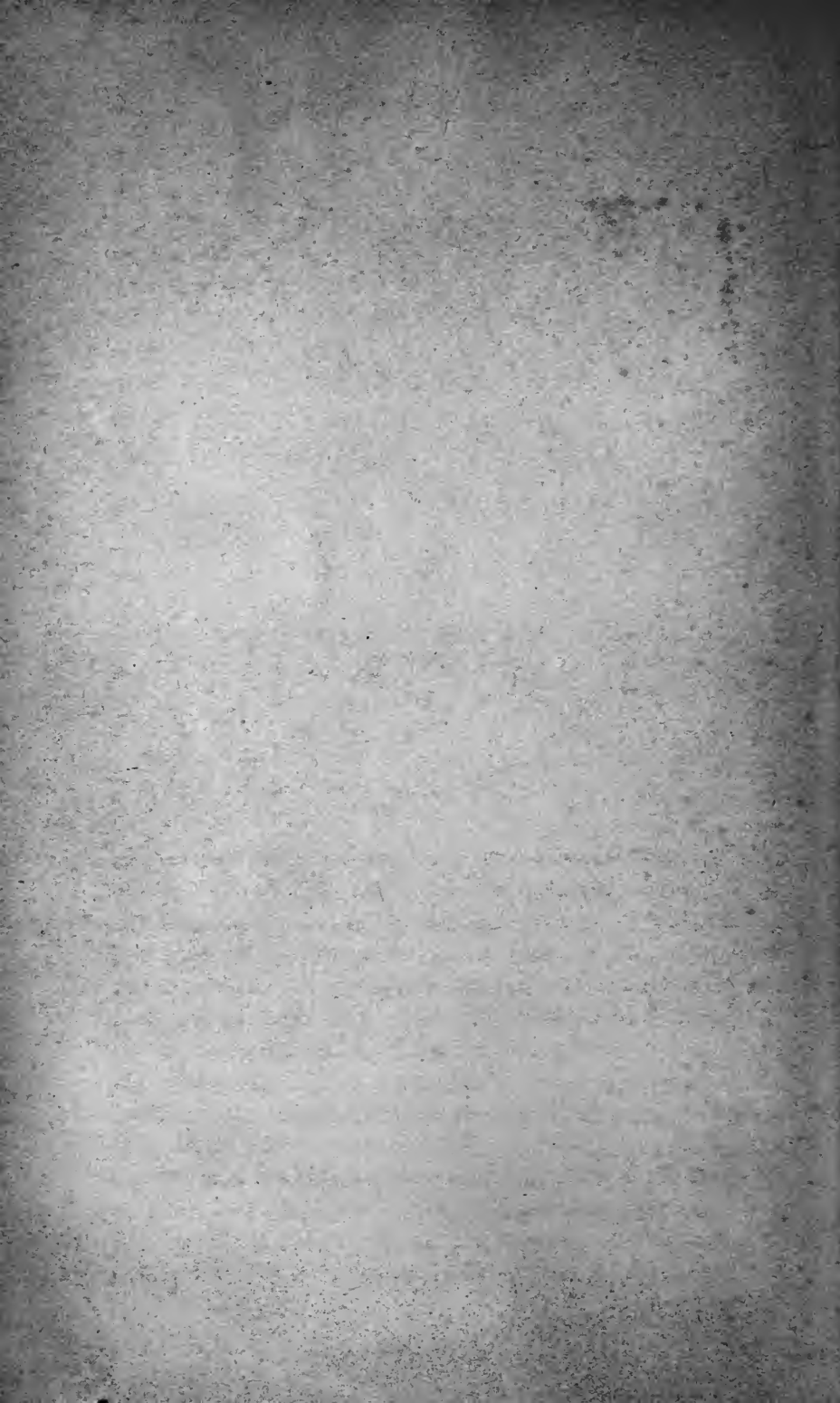
The demolition of the famous structure was begun at the end of the year 1884, and excited a large amount of interest not only in the town itself, but in theatrical circles generally throughout the country. By the kindness of Mr. Hilditch, of Asgill House, the purchaser of the property, such as were sufficiently interested in the historical building were allowed to take a last look at it previous to the advent of the destroyer, and many availed themselves of the privilege. Photographs of the place were taken by local photographers, and *some* enthusiasts had frames made of the wood taken from the stage to place the pictures in. At last the evil day came when the angels of destruction descended on the doomed playhouse and removed it from off the earth, even using the very bricks and woodwork for enlarging some mineral water works in the town, at least so it was stated. Thus darkly ended the career of Richmond Playhouse, which had begun so brightly an hundred and nineteen years ago.

It was too much to hope that in the present age of competition and improvement, Richmond Theatre should have been allowed to stand as a relic of bygone days and people. And yet while the house where Shakespeare was born is allowed to remain, that wherein his great exponent, Kean, "with powers almost as divine as the poet's," lived and died, has been ruthlessly swept away. The building stood at the corner of a

thoroughfare little used or likely to be used, and, without hindering any very great improvement, might well have been preserved as an interesting memorial of the past. It was a quaint place and an excellent specimen of the country playhouse of a hundred years ago—one of the last of its kind—and as such was dear to all those who, like Mr. Hardecastle, “love everything that’s old.” But Richmond Theatre must now be numbered with the things that were; this ancient Temple of the Drama exists no longer save in the memories of those who knew and loved it for the many famous names and associations with which it was identified. And now also this history—so pleasurable in its compilation—draws to a close. Gladly would we fill many more pages with incidents related to us by playgoers, who have seen the third George walking about the Richmond streets—playgoers who were amongst the audience at Edmund Kean’s last performance, when he fell back fainting in the arms of his son—and many others. Unfortunately, these events are of a too vague and rambling description to be reproduced here; and with many regrets thereat, and sincerely hoping that what *has* been written has been found acceptable to the reader, these records of “A Celebrated Old Playhouse” are reluctantly brought to a conclusion.

THE END.







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